DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 592 CG 015 013

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TITLE A Survey of Student Rights in a Public and Alternative High School.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; Comparative Analysis; Discipline Policy; Dress Codes; Due Process; Freedom of Speech; *High School Students; *Nontraditional Education; *School Policy; Secondary Education; *Student Attitudes; Student Government; *Student Rights

ABSTRACT

An inner-city alternative high school in Chicago was established for older black teenagers who had dropped out or did not wish to attend public schools. Alternative high school students (N=100) were surveyed to compare their opinions on student rights with those of black inner-city public high school students (N=200) obtained in an earlier study. The survey examined attitudes toward freedom of speech, due process of law, misconduct and discipline, vague regulations and dress code, and student governance. The more conservative alternative students rejected the use of free speech and abusive language at a higher percentage than public school students. Alternative school students were more aware of due process rights, favored a disciplined school atmosphere and student governance, and rejected search and seizure procedures. Compared to public school students, the alternative school students reported neutral attitudes toward dress and hair styles, and more strongly rejected the selling and use of drugs and tobacco in school. Results suggest that the "second-chance" alternative students may value education and recognize the need for regulations, while realizing that as students, they have the same protected rights and privileges as adults within reasonable limits. (NRB)

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A SURVEY OF STUDENT RIGHTS IN A PUBLIC AND ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

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Winter 1980

CG 015013

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A SURVEY OF STUDENT RIGHTS IN A PUBLIC AND ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

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A recent survey of Chicago black inner-city alternative school students shows they are more conservative than their public school peers. One hundred high school students randomly selected from an inner-city alternative high school on Chicago's southside were questioned. The high school was established for older teenagers who had dropped out or did not wish to attend or felt they were too old in relation to their grade level for the public schools. The opinions of the alternative students were compared with black inner-city public high school students in an earlier study. (1)

Here are the comparative results.

TABLE I

RESPONSE OF STUDENTS REGARDING FREEDOM OF SPEECH

	Alternative School Students N-100			Public School Students N-200		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Should students be allowed to speak in class whenever they wish?	18%	71%	11%	32%	59%	9%
2. Should students be allowed to use abusive language in the classroom?	2%	85%	13%	23%	74%	3%
3. Should students be allowed to use informal slang?	25%	63%	12%	23%	71%	6%
4. Should students be allowed to speak and/or write non-standard English?	24%	46%	30%			
5. Should students have the right to question their teachers?	49%	37%	14%	19%	81%	--
6. Should students have the right to question classroom rules?	85%	8%	7%	42%	52%	6%
7. Should students be allowed to publish a school newspaper that criticizes the school administration?	32%	52%	16%	20%	76%	4%
8. Should students be allowed to say prayers in the classroom?	38%	28%	34%	50%	18%	32%
9. Should students be allowed to distribute underground literature?	18%	48%	34%	38%	57%	5%
10. Should students have the right to hold meetings in school?	74%	12%	14%			

TABLE II

RESPONSES OF STUDENTS REGARDING DUE PROCESS OF LAW

	Alternative School Students N=100			Public School Students N=200		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
11. Should students' records, I.Q. and achievement test scores be kept private for him and his parents (except for teachers, administrators and counselors)?	58%	34%	8%			
12. Should students have the right to procedural due process, including notice of hearing, presence of legal counsel, cross-examination or confrontation of witnesses, and freedom from self-incrimination?	69%	4%	27%			
13. If a student is called before the principal for misconduct, should he be allowed to have his parent, guardian or lawyer present?	68%	18%	14%	64%	24%	12%
14. Should students be allowed the right to appeal judgment against them?	66%	11%	23%	42%	19%	39%
15. Should students be threatened or intimated to testify against themselves?	32%	48%	20%	81%	3%	11%
16. Should a student who is accused of misconduct be allowed to question his accusers?	82%	5%	13%	79%	6%	14%

TABLE III

RESPONSES OF STUDENTS REGARDING MISCONDUCT & DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

	Alternative School Students N=100			Public School Students N=200		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
17. Should students be suspended from school if found guilty of misconduct?	56%	29%	15%	39%	44%	17%
18. Should physical punishment be used for students who have serious behavior problems?	29%	58%	13%			
19. Should students who purposefully destroy school property be expelled from school?	80%	7%	13%	59%	29%	12%
20. Should school suspension be recorded on the students' record?	79%	7%	14%	57%	24%	19%
21. Should the principal have the authority to keep a students' diploma because of a students' attitude or misconduct?	55%	33%	12%			
22. Should students who use drugs and alcohol in school be expelled from school?	65%	21%	14%	56%	33%	11%
23. Should students who sell drugs in school be expelled from school?	78%	13%	9%	62%	29%	9%
24. Should students who continually disrupt the classroom be expelled from school?	56%	27%	16%	60%	31%	9%

TABLE IV

STUDENT RESPONSES REGARDING VAGUE REGULATIONS AND DRESS CODE

	Alternative School Students N=100			Public School Students N=200		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
25. Should the school have the right of reasonable search of students?	30%	52%	18%	52%	42%	2%
26. Should the school have the right to seize students property if it is reasonable?	29%	55%	16%	55%	38%	17%
27. Should smoking be prohibited if specified that it is against the best interest of the school?	50%	29%	21%			
28. Should young men be allowed to wear long hair, long afros, braids or hair rollers to school?	41%	34%	25%	78%	8%	14%
29. Should young ladies be allowed to wear long afros or hair rollers to school?	46%	40%	14%	79%	9%	13%
30. Should young men be allowed to wear head bands, hats or rags in school?	17%	67%	16%	21%	52%	27%
31. Should students be allowed to wear open shirts, extreme miniskirts or hot pants to school?	29%	51%	20%	84%	14%	2%
32. Should the school have the right to make students keep a standard of cleanliness? (personal hygiene)	69%	10%	21%	66%	8%	26%

TABLE V

RESPONSES OF STUDENTS REGARDING STUDENT GOVERNANCE

	Alternative School Students N=100		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
33. Should students be forced to attend school ceremonies and activities (such as basketball games, sock hops and assemblies)?	13%	76%	11%
34. Should student courts be used to determine the guilt or innocence of a fellow student?	40%	38%	22%
35. Should students be forced to go to activities that promote academic refinement? (such as operas, plays)	28%	56%	16%
36. Should the student council make school regulations concerning the conduct and governance of students?	57%	20%	23%
37. Should students have the right to use school facilities within a reasonable time frame (for recreation & student meetings)?	74%	10%	16%
38. Should student grievance procedures be developed for students?	57%	12%	31%

Although the comparative findings were similar, the alternative high school students rejected the use of free speech and abusive language at a higher percentage than public school students. What is also interesting is that 63 and 46 percent of alternative students rejected the use of informal slang and the writing of non-standard English, respectively.

In regards to questioning class rules and the teacher, the alternative students were more liberal than the public schoolers. The difference in responses of the two groups is most likely due to the differences in age, maturity and life experiences of the alternative school students. Consequently, the alternative students were more aware of their due process rights than their public school peers, particularly in regards to Fifth Amendment rights. They also appeared to be more aware of the need for a disciplined atmosphere in school. Although they favored suspension and expulsion, the majority (58%) rejected corporal punishment. The majority not only favored student governance, but rejected the schools use of search and seizure procedures.

The conservative posture of the alternative students was best illustrated by their neutral attitudes toward dress and hair styles when compared to their public school counterparts. Interestingly, the majority (54%-60%) of male alternative students favored long hair, afros and rollers and the wearing of open shirts, mini-skirts and hot pants to school, whereas a similar percentage of females rejected this mode of dress and favored a dress code.

The maturity of alternative students is also reflected in their majority rejection of the selling and use of drugs and smoking in school in relation to the responses of public school students.

The results show the "second-chance" alternative school students valued education. They not only appeared to desire a well organized and operated school and learning atmosphere, but realized the need for certain rules and regulations. The data indicate they were aware that they do not leave their constitutional rights at the school door. As students they have the same protected rights and privileges as adults within reasonable limits.

References

Ogletree, Earl and Chambers, Maria. Black Inner-City High School Students Surprisingly Conservative on Rights Questions. Kappan, April 1978, 59, 8, 562-63.